

**Is South Korea Ready for Multicultural Families(“다문화”)?
An Analysis of Social Media**

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The Republic of Korea is known as a homogenous country; a recent trend, however, is an increase in young women from other Asian countries who marry Korean men, which challenges the normative familial structure of Korean families and communities. Our analysis uses social media to examine the narrative of Koreans as they discuss what will be required of Korea to accept multicultural families and children. Three Korean web portals—Daum, Nate and Naver—were surveyed over the summer and fall of 2012 for articles and comments on multicultural families. While we acknowledge that posters are not a representative sample of all Koreans, the web portals offer a slice of information about the public debate surrounding multicultural families. Korean web portals are a form of social communication that is not replicated in countries such as the United States; the web portals offer a timely assessment of public opinion that would be missed in nationally representative surveys. Preliminary findings show that the number of postings and concern about multi-cultural families has increased and that the public discourse on the Internet is meaningful in the development of a community of “netizens” as a reflection of contemporary Korean society.

Is South Korea Ready for Multicultural Families(“다문화”)? An Analysis of Social Media

The Republic of Korea is known as a homogenous country that traditionally was the origination country for migration and not the destination country. A recent trend, however, is an increase in migration, particularly of young women from other Asian countries who marry Korean men. This challenges the normative familial structure of Korean families and communities. How is the Korean society viewing these changes and what will be required of Korea to accept the multicultural families and children? To examine this question we turn to a new repository of information: the social media.

The Demographic Setting

The number of foreigners living in South Korea topped 1 million (1,106,884) for the first time in 2009, which was an increase of 106 percent since 2006 when there were 536,627 foreigners in the country (Do Je-Hae, 2009).¹ It is estimated that the number of foreigners will continue to increase to 2.53 million in 2020 and 4.09 million by 2050.²

The terms used regarding multiculturalism in Korean society need to be specified carefully. The central term *damunwha*, which literally means multicultural in English is used in Korea as an adjective meaning multicultural. For instance a multicultural society is

¹ Do Je-hae, “1.1 Million Foreigners Live in Korea,” *Korea Times*, August 5, 2012, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2011/04/116_49665.html (accessed September 11, 2012).

² Andrew Eungi Kim, “Korean Multiculturalism: The Genealogy of the Concept, Shifting Meanings, Issues and Implications,” *Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53(2): 102-129, p. 102.

damunhwashoe and multicultural families are *damunhwagajok*.³ Kim found that the usage of these terms and others related to *daumunwha* increased exponentially in Korean newspapers starting in the mid-2000s. Although there had been use of the term in the media in the 1990s—and a few scattered references earlier--the term was generally used in relation to other countries particularly to immigrant countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia.⁴ Use of the term in academia followed the trend of newspaper usage with hundreds of articles/theses/dissertations written since 2006 that focus on some aspect of multiculturalism.⁵

Kim relates the explosion of the term in the media and academia to public policy that shifted from exclusion to inclusion, particularly in the mid-2000s. But there were also demographic reasons behind the rise in the number of immigrants and in particular the increasing percentage of cross-border marriages. As of 2010 over 10 percent of all registered marriages in South Korea included a foreign spouse.⁶ Of the 307,429 foreigners entering South Korea in 2011, 20,333 entered with residence visas and 783 had marriage immigration visas. The overall sex ratio of immigrants was 121.8, but gender segregation becomes evident when looking at

³ Kim, “Korean Multiculturalism: The Genealogy of the Concept, Shifting Meanings, Issues and Implications,” 104.

⁴ Kim, “Korean Multiculturalism: The Genealogy of the Concept, Shifting Meanings, Issues and Implications,” 110.

⁵ Kim, “Korean Multiculturalism: The Genealogy of the Concept, Shifting Meanings, Issues and Implications,” 113-114.

⁶ “Herr and Madame, Señor and Mrs: Research at last begins to cast some light on the extent, causes and consequences of cross-border marriages,” *The Economist*, November 12, 2011, print edition, <http://www.economist.com/node/21538103/print> (accessed August 2, 2012).

specific countries. For instance, Uzbekistan with 8,180 immigrants had a sex ratio of 221.5 and Sri Lanka with 5,892 immigrants had a sex ratio of 2,968.8, nearly all of which were unskilled workers.⁷ On the other hand, females from the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam vastly outnumber men for residence and marriage visas. As seen in Table 1, marriage visas and the residence visas are nearly all secured by women, particularly for these three sending countries, which have traditionally been the source of brides for many cross-border marriages.

The mean age at marriage for women has been increasing rapidly in South Korea, from 24.1 years in 1985 to 29.14 years in 2011.⁸ At the same time, the young people coming to be of marital age was decreasing each year as a result of declining fertility nearly every year in the past 30 years. For instance, there were 438,186 women aged 30 in 1990 and only 390,965 women of that same age in 2012.⁹ With cohorts that are contracting due to decreases in fertility, the number of younger women available to older men becomes increasingly smaller, thus leading to a marriage squeeze.

In addition, the sex ratio at birth in South Korea has varied greatly depending to some extent on the zodiac calendar with values as low as 104.6 in 1973. Starting in 1986 the sex ratio at birth began to increase from 112 in 1986 to as high as 116.5 in 1990 and 115 in 1993 and 1994

⁷ KOSIS, "Number of Incoming Foreigners by type of visa and citizenship," [DT_1B28023], downloaded September 11, 2012. <http://kosis.kr/nsieng/view/stat10.do>

⁸ Sam-Sik Lee, "Low Fertility and Policy Responses in Korea," *The Japanese Journal of Population* 7(1): 57-70.

⁹ US Census Bureau. "International demographic data base," <http://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/region.php> (accessed September 11, 2012).

respectively. Since 2007 the sex ratio at birth has been at around 106.¹⁰ This means that the birth cohorts of the early 1990s will soon be reaching marriageable age and men will have fewer potential partners.

The Public Discourse Setting

To date, much of the discussion surrounding *damunwha* has been through official government statements and major newspapers, and has been presented in a very positive light. The South Korean government provides various policies and services to aid the *damunhwa* families and migrant women. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family is the main ministry that is in charge of *damunhwa* affairs. On its website, under the section where it provides information on their policies, there is an entire category labeled “*damunhwa* family support.” Their stated policy vision is “to realize the mature global nation embracing advanced multicultural society,” and their goal is “to improve the life quality of multicultural families and to provide stable policies” and “to strengthen the support for children in the multicultural families and to cultivate global leaders.”¹¹ Aside from these policies, there are other policies under other categories that are geared toward migrant woman and their adjustment to the Korean society. The ministry also provides a list of multicultural family support centers which number

¹⁰ KOSIS, “Vital Statistics of Korea,” <http://kosis.kr/nsieng/view/stat10.do> (accessed September 11, 2012).

¹¹ Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, Republic of Korea, Family Policy section, “Supporting Multicultural Families,” http://english.mogef.go.kr/sub02/sub02_61_04.jsp (accessed October 2, 2012).

more than 210 scattered across the nation.¹² “Emergency Support Center for Migrant Women” is another service that runs a 24-hour hotline for migrant women.¹³ This service also provides overarching help for the adjustment and resolution of issues for migrant women in Korea.

The Korean government is very active in promoting a multicultural society and very supportive of aiding *damunhwa* families and migrant women. The South Korean media tends to be in line with the positivist positions of the government and publishes many articles in favor of *damunhwa*. At the *Danuri* website, which is a website dedicated to *damunhwa* support, there is a section that lists the media coverage of *damunhwa* and migrant women. Most--if not all--of the articles listed are written in favor of *damunhwa*.¹⁴ Most of the related articles that made the headlines on the main portal sites on the Internet news section are also in favor *damunhwa*. An opinion piece that claims “Chosun was originally a *damunhwa* society” published on the website of *JoongAng Daily*, one of the three major newspapers in Korea, is an example of this discourse of advocating the necessity of accepting *damunhwa* trends.¹⁵ Another stream of discourse that

¹² Danuri, “Multicultural Family Support Centers,”

http://www.liveinkorea.kr/en/sub01_1_1.asp?pzt=mb&mbgroup1=&pg=21 (accessed October 2, 2012).

¹³ Emergency Support Center for Migrant Women, <http://www.wm1366.org/main.asp> (accessed October 2, 2012).

¹⁴ Danuri, “*Damunhwa* in the Media,” http://www.liveinkorea.kr/board/board_list.asp?id=1029 (accessed October 2, 2012).

¹⁵ “[이영아의 여론女論] 조선은 원래 ‘다문화 사회’였다,” *Joongang Daily*, December 10, 2010, http://article.joinsmsn.com/news/article/article.asp?Total_Id=4776317, accessed September 22, 2012.

permeates from the media coverage is the victimization of migrant women and *damunhwa* families to induce sympathy and support for this minority. Such articles are presented as case studies in sections below.

Because of the government and media's pro-*daumunhwa* stance, there are limited opportunities to observe and document public opinion pertaining to *daumunwha* from Korean citizens. The Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs did take a nationally representative poll and reported that over half of Korean citizens fear that the increase of foreigners will create conflict in various issues of society.¹⁶ This report surveyed 1000 Korean men and women above the age of 20 through telephone interviews. Notable results included that 63.9 percent agreed (and 8.4 percent strongly agreed) with the statement, "If the number of children of foreigners/immigrants increase, they will arouse conflicts with Korean students." Nearly two-thirds (64.0 percent) of the respondents answered that they were worried that foreigners and immigrants would create demonstrations and social turbulence. Half of the respondents (50.3 percent) thought that if the foreigner/immigrant population increased, Koreans would increasingly have a harder time finding jobs. Nearly two-thirds (65.7 percent) of those over the age of 65 agreed to this particular statement.

The Spectrum of Koreans

The increased use of and exposure to the term *damunhwa* led Koreans to be more conscious of ethnic labels than they were before. This awareness feeds into the need to distinguish Koreans from foreigners, which naturally leads one to question what defines a

¹⁶ Lee, S.S. (2012). Public Perception and Implications of Inflow of Foreigners. *Health and Welfare Issue & Focus* 121: 1-8.

“Korean.” Defining what a “Korean” is proving to be increasingly difficult as traditional notions of being “Korean” are not so evident in the context of the current Korean society. Kim Yi-seon claims that it is, “...time to redefine a Korean...Traditionally, a Korean meant someone born to Korean parents in Korea, who speaks Korean and has Korean looks and nationality. People don’t think someone is a Korean just because he has a Korean citizenship.”¹⁷ However, this confusion over the “true” identity of a “Korean” has created a spectrum of different groups that in one way or another could be viewed as a Korean. Interestingly, on this spectrum, *damunhwa* families are not necessarily at the very far end, away from being a “pure Korean,” but they are seen as the least integrated Koreans.

Damunhwa families are officially recognized by law as Korean citizens (although there are cases in which the legal situation is not yet resolved) and thus, should be differentiated from foreign workers and illegal immigrants. Currently, the general understanding of the composition of a *damunhwa* family is that it has a Korean parent and a foreign-born parent—usually a Korean father and a foreign-born mother—with ethnically mixed children.

A particularly interesting aspect of how Koreans view who qualifies as “Koreans” is represented in the status of overseas Koreans (해외동포) or, to translate the Korean term while containing the nuances, the “brethren.” These “Koreans” hold a special place in the Korean society as they have their own designated visas (F-4) that allow them advantages over other

¹⁷ Choe, Sang-Hun, “In Changing South Korea, Who Counts as ‘Korean’?,” *The New York Times*, November 30, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/30/world/asia/demographic-shifts-redefine-society-in-south-korea.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (Accessed December 1, 2012).

foreigners in obtaining the right to reside in Korea.¹⁸ Also, the media tends to report on the positive aspects of the overseas Korean community and claims the achievements of overseas Koreans as Korea's own:

“The role of ethnicity in South Koreans' self-image explains why they take such pride in the success of ethnic Koreans abroad, like the new president of the World Bank, the Korean-American Jim Yong Kim. It also explains why they considered it a national shame that a Korean-born American resident, Seung-Hui Cho, 23, killed 32 in a shooting rampage at Virginia Tech in 2007 before killing himself, even though he had emigrated with his family when he was 8.”¹⁹

Another striking example of this is the case of the French Junior Minister Fleur Pellerin who was born in Korea but was adopted by French parents when she six months old.²⁰ Despite the clear indication that Pellerin did not identify herself as Korean, the Korean media treated her as a Korean and her success as a great achievement of the Korean people. In contrast, Jasmine Lee, the “first naturalized citizen...and the first non-ethnic Korean...to win a seat in South Korea's

¹⁸ Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Chicago, “Visa Issuance,” <http://usa-chicago.mofat.go.kr/english/am/usa-chicago/visa/issuance/index.jsp> (Accessed December 1, 2012).

¹⁹ Choe, “In Changing South Korea, Who Counts as ‘Korean’?”

²⁰ “‘Adopted’ French minister sparks Korean soul searching,” *AFP*, May 18, 2012, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jJN8Dka9Tk6ByNG_PRKgxZr4LAhw?docId=CNG.349de2c2d527b38385bfbb2ac21cbfb0.551 (Accessed November 14, 2012).

National Assembly” did not receive such welcoming responses.²¹ After her election, “anti-immigration activists warned that “poisonous weeds” from abroad were “corrupting the Korean bloodline” and “exterminating the Korean nation” and urged political parties to “purify” themselves by expelling Ms. Lee from the National Assembly.”²² Technically speaking, Pellerin is only ethnically Korean while Lee is all but ethnically Korean. Given that both women are public figures in government, their nationality and place of permanent residence is the most relevant factors, thus making Lee Korean and Pellerin not.

North Korean defectors who settle in Korea also take up a seat in the spectrum of Koreans. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Korea, North Korean defectors are granted Korean citizenship by default because they were citizens of North Korea, which is legally considered to be the territory of the Republic of Korea.²³ Not only do they enjoy legal recognition as Koreans, but they are also perceived as Koreans or at least of the same bloodline as Koreans who originated from the Southern part of the Korean peninsula.

As examined above, the term “Korean” does not evoke a unified or definite concept but actually summons several shades or levels of Korean identity that all, in one way or another, are associated with “Korean-ness.” Such lack of a clear consensus serves as a potential cause for severe social conflict regarding *damunhwa* issues and ethnic labeling that is revealed in the findings of our research provided later in this paper.

²¹ Choe, “In Changing South Korea, Who Counts as ‘Korean’?”

²² Choe, “In Changing South Korea, Who Counts as ‘Korean’?”

²³ Han, S. W. and Bae, J.S. (2002). The Legal Status of North Korean Defectors and Solutions for their Protection. Report on the Study of North and South Korean Government Legislation. Seoul: Ministry of Government Legislation

Data and Methods

Because much of the official discourse is currently dominated by the government campaigns and articles published through the official sources of media such as major newspapers, we examined postings from three major South Korean internet portals during the summer and fall of 2012 to understand better the responses from citizens about *damunwha*.

Chung details the function and magnitude of such major portals in the context of the Korean society,

“Nowadays, major newspapers in Korea have themselves become dependent on major portals to reach out to young readers. Since major portal sites in Korea allow users to gain easy access to diverse sources of information and entertainment including news, texts, music, games, and animations, youngsters do not need to read major newspapers. More recently, major Internet portals such as Naver, Daum...have provided services known as “converged searching,” which includes navigating communities, searching news, blogging (including mini-home pages), and exchanging emails, to attract young users. 50 Internet portals have become not only a tool for information searching but also an online community where users share and exchange their ideas. Converged searching also provides information from the search results of UCC. For example, Naver’s Ji-Sik In (Knowledgeable Person) service enables Web users to ask and answer questions posted by other users. Currently, this service has

accumulated more than 60 million pieces of information and experiences, making it a reliable database.”²⁴

The three web portals used for this analysis are: Daum, Naver, and Nate. The web portals allow for comments on articles, which are ranked by how many “likes” or “recommendations” are received for each article; dislike buttons are also available. It is important to understand that these comments are prone to be inflammatory and blunt. Many people commenting refer to statistics and facts to make their point about anti-multiculturalism, but rarely do they reveal the source or cite their facts. The articles themselves can be written in a way to arouse controversy and intense reaction.

All three portals essentially provide the same content. However, by examining all three web portals, one can get an overall picture of the use, perception, and reaction of Korean Internet users. More than four out of five Koreans (84.1 percent) use the Internet.²⁵ According to CNN, “Broadband Internet speeds in the United States are only about one-fourth as fast as those in South Korea.”²⁶ Thus, the Internet is a place of public opinion and active interaction. However, such intense activity in cyberspace provides an environment for social issues to go viral. The

²⁴ Jongpil Chung, “Comparing Online Activities in China and South Korea: The Internet and the Political Regime,” *Asian Survey* 48(5):727-751. p. 749.

²⁵ The World Bank Group (2012). Internet Users (per 100 People) [electronic resource]. Washington, DC: The World Bank Group. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2>

²⁶ John D. Sutter, “Why Internet connections are fastest in South Korea,” *CNN Tech*, March 31, 2010, http://articles.cnn.com/2010-03-31/tech/broadband.south.korea_1_broadband-plan-south-korea-broadband-internet?_s=PM:TECH, accessed August 17, 2012.

three web portals introduced in this report reflect different aspects of the public opinion on the Korean Internet.

Naver is the most frequently used web portal. The *New York Times* reported, “Tapping a South Korean inclination to help one another on the Web has made Naver.com the undisputed leader of Internet search in the country. It handles more than 77 percent of all Web searches originating in South Korea.”²⁷ In March 2012, Naver has revised its comments service on the news section so that users can choose to see the comments with the most comments. A month later, Naver went further to create a comment system that allows users to comment without separately logging onto their Naver accounts. Instead, users can use other Social Network Services (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter to comment directly on the news articles.²⁸ Users can also re-tweet their comments along with the article, which increases the chance for the article to spread to other realms of the Internet. The final feature that Naver launched is the “agree” and “disagree” buttons that users can click to respond to a comment. With its recent efforts to increase the convenience of commenting and to encourage users to respond to comments by other users, Naver is ever more influential in reflecting, creating and dispersing information as well as the perception and reaction of the Korean public to such information.

²⁷ Choe Sang-hun, “South Koreans Connect Through Search Engine,” *New York Times*, July 5, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/05/technology/05online.html?_r=2&oref=slogin, accessed September 22, 2012.

²⁸ “네이버 뉴스의 서비스 소식: 공지사항,” Naver, April 19, 2012, <http://news.naver.com/main/ombudsman/notice.nhn?mid=omb&docId=10000000000025524067>, accessed August 24, 2012.

Nate requires all users to use their real names when they comment which provides a point of contrast to the two other portal sites. Daum allows its users to post comments with their IDs or Internet nicknames. Naver discloses the first four letters of its users' ID or Internet nicknames. Interestingly, the fact that Nate users have to reveal their real name did not hinder them from posting inflammatory and violent comments.

Despite the breadth and depth of the web portal system of Korea, we do understand it is not without its limitations as a source for collecting data. First and foremost we acknowledge that the comments on the web portals are not an unbiased sample. We would expect that people holding extreme views would be the most likely to post, but the web portals offer a glimpse of the viewpoints of Koreans. Also, the Korean web portals are a form of social communication that is not replicated in the United States. We mine these social media sites as a new form of data collection. While imperfect, they offer a timely assessment of concerns of the populace. The study of reactions and responses of Koreans on the Internet serve as valuable data in understanding the sentiment of the Korean population on the sensitive issues of *damunhwa* families and policies. The widespread use of the Internet in Korea, in contrast to the limited usage of the traditional means of communication such the television, radio, and newspapers, has facilitated the interaction between the government and the people, and among the people. In particular, the "Internet provides a multi-route interactive medium that makes it easier for people to communicate and exchange opinions with many others at the same time."²⁹ In South Korea, such functions of the Internet have proven to be a strong "catalyst for organizing citizen groups into a powerful force and proved very effective for understanding and shaping public opinion."³⁰

²⁹ Chung, *ibid.* pp. 728.

³⁰ Chung, *ibid.* pp. 733.

Within the vibrant Internet culture, “netizens” have become influential agents of public opinion and creators of online content on the Korean web.³¹ Literally translated as the “citizens of the Internet,” the netizens have arguably constructed a distinct presence and identity that can be parallel to that of the citizenship in the traditional sense.³² As Chung explains, the “expansion of the Internet has led to an increasing number of offline activities being connected to offline activities. The leaders of Korea allow various online communities to freely discuss politically sensitive issues and criticize government leaders both on- and offline.”³³ The most notable example of the power of social media and cyber participation the world recently experienced is the “Arab Spring” of 2011, in which the “social media networks played an important role in the rapid disintegration of at least two regimes, Tunisia and Egypt, while also contributing to

³¹ Chung, *ibid.* pp. 745.

³² In a footnote in Chung’s article, there is an explanation of the concept of netizens. “According to Michael and Ronda Hauben, netizens are “not just anyone who comes online. Netizens are not people who come online for individual gain or profit. They are not people who come to the Net thinking it is a service. Rather, they are the people who understand it takes effort and action on each and everyone’s part to make the Net a regenerative and vibrant community and resource. Netizens are people who decide to devote time and effort into making the Net, this new part of our world, a better place.” Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben, *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* (Washington, D.C.: IEEE[Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers] Computer Society Press, 1997), p.1.”

³³ Chung, *ibid.* pp. 734.

sociopolitical mobilization in Bahrain and Syria.”³⁴ Later on in this paper, we examine such efforts to mobilize Internet users to engage in offline activities on the issues of *damunhwa*.

Findings

Before examining individual stories, we determined how frequently stories about *damunwha* and migrant women were included in the news articles from various news agencies provided through the service of the three websites. Data shown in Table 2 are for 2008 up through October 2012 so that we can better detect when major stories were published that received many comments. As seen in Table 2, the numbers of articles increased exponentially, which corroborates Kim’s findings about the increase of reporting on *damunhwa* in the news media, particularly since 2008, with the term used 67 times in the *Chosunilbo* portal in 2006 and 797 times in 2009.³⁵

In this section we use eleven case studies to highlight the tenor of the public discourse on these three web sites. For each case study we give the essence of the news story, then include quotes from some responders, and we include some data about the number of people who commented on each news story. Each article that was selected for the case studies were featured as a “top story” in the main headlines of the news section of each portal. Thus, these articles were among the most exposed and accessed articles in the news section. In general, for the

³⁴ Stepanova, Ekaterina (2011). The Role of Information Communication Technologies in the “Arab Spring.” PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No.159. Washington, DC: The Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia.

http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/ponars/pepm_159.pdf

³⁵ Kim, *ibid.*, p. 107.

purpose of collecting data, articles that had a relatively large amount of comments were selected. Also, the selected 10 articles represent a spectrum of issues that underlie the *damunhwa* phenomenon in Korea.

Daum

Several articles posted in Daum were selected to examine the public opinion on the web regarding the issue of Multicultural families and foreigners. Each section is devoted to one article and the top three ranking comments that received the most recommendations. The title of the article and the date it was published are the headings of each section, followed by a short description on the content of the article. A translation of the top three comments is provided at the end of each section.

Case Study #1) “2nd Generation Multicultural Children are driven out” (2012/06/05)³⁶

Children of multicultural families wander out of school due to discrimination and bullying. Many worry that if this situation does not change, then it can cause social conflict. The rate of matriculation into elementary school of such children is 85 percent, and for high school only 30 percent. There is an urgent need for a stronger multicultural policy. Unregistered immigrant children number 28,511 and all of them will be of “illegal immigrant status after high school graduation.”

This article received 735 comments in total. The 1st ranking comment was “Multicultural policies necessarily fail...Europe is an example...Is there a country in this world that has a

³⁶ “[사회] 밖으로 내몰리는 다문화 2세대,” Daum, June 15, 2012,

<http://media.daum.net/society/newsview?newsid=20120605192413186>, accessed June 17, 2012.

successful multicultural policy????” and received 278 likes, 13 dislikes, and 25 comments. The 2nd ranking comment stated, “So don’t do these kinds of things in the first place. Why is the government encouraging this???? In Germany, even German-born Turkish children do not receive an European citizenship after the age of 18, and they either go back to Turkey or commit hardcore crimes in Germany... This was a well-known fact since 10 years ago. Why does this ****(swear words) country blindly follow other countries that clearly failed?” This comment received 214 likes, 9 dislikes, and 2 comments. The 3rd ranking comment stated. “The stupidest person in Korea is who does interracial marriages. Did they ever think of what kind of life their children would live? Don’t you know how Koreans are? I am sure that among children from multicultural families, many will commit suicide or become murderers.” This comment received 209 likes, 23 dislikes, and 5 comments.

Case Study #2) “*Korean-Chinese, NOT the same people, Koreans drawing the line*”
(2012/04/20)³⁷

This article was the fourth article in the special series titled “Xenophobia! A warning/threat for a multicultural society.” This article argued that criticism against Korean-

³⁷ “"조선족, 같은 민족 아냐" 선 긋는 한국인들,” Daum, April 20, 2012,

http://media.daum.net/society/others/newsview?newsid=20120420080035258&cateid=1067&RI_GHT_COMM=R1, accessed August 28, 2012.

Chinese³⁸ is equivalent to criticizing ourselves (Koreans). This article also warned that branding Korean-Chinese as “criminals” is dangerous.

This article received 5604 comments in total. The 1st ranking comment stated. “Before writing articles like this, search Korean-Chinese Internet pages/websites. Then you will know who thinks of who as same people (meaning that it is the Korean-Chinese, not the Koreans, who draw the line). They are “to the bone (truly)” Chinese.” This comment received 4118 likes, 115 dislikes, and 190 comments. The 2nd ranking comment stated, “See? It even says in the article that they came to earn money. So they don’t get discriminated against in China but in Korea they do so in the end, they want to earn money comfortably. Then are they paying taxes?” This comment received 3337 likes, 80 dislikes, and 28 comments. The 3rd ranking comment was “They are Chinese” and received 3186 likes, 77 dislikes, and 12 comments.

Case Study #3) “*Opinion poll results- support ‘The Coexistence of Diverse Peoples-Cultures’ only 36 percent*” (2012/04/19)³⁹

This article presented the results of the 1st study of Multiculturalism acceptance index in which higher the score, the higher the tolerance for Multiculturalism. Overall, the index was 51.2 out of 100 and only numbered 51.8 even among those who have immigrant relatives.

³⁸ Korean-Chinese are ethnic Koreans living in China: Korean immigrants who moved to and settled in China, Russia, and their adjoining areas in the early 20th century. In Korean, they are commonly referred to as “*Chosunjok* (조선족).”

³⁹ “다양한 인종-문화 공존 찬성 36%뿐,” Daum, April 19, 2012.

<http://media.daum.net/society/newsview?newsid=20120419032918351>, accessed August 28, 2012.

This article received 536 comments in total. The 1st ranking comment was “Even in the United States, an immigrant country, only after strict evaluation do they issue working visas. Even if a foreigner was issued a working visa with a warranty of a company, if that company fires that person and that person fails to find another job, then that person automatically becomes an illegal alien and must immediately leave the United States. Japan, a country that is similar to Korea, does not practice multiculturalism and is very strict on illegal alien issues. Also, in Japan, you cannot imagine giving a foreigner a seat in the Diet just because that foreigner lived in Japan for some years. Why does Korea insist on spending 100 billion Korean Won a year on foreigners, and give them a seat in the National Assembly and indiscriminately aid illegal aliens?” This comment received 227 likes, 8 dislikes, and 15 comments. The 2nd ranking comment stated, “It is weird that not even one case of the many crimes that foreigners from South East Asia commit are broadcasted through the media.” (This commenter proceeded to give statistics as below.)

murder – 2008: 85 people, 2009: 103 people

rape – 2008: 114 people, 2009: 126 people

robbery – 2008: 133, 2009: 260

violence – 2008: 4940, 2009: 5322

theft – 2008: 1343, 2009: 2001

“The numbers above have been accumulated through reports to the police 2003 to 2009, foreign murder suspects: 448, rape suspects: 585.”

This comment received 220 likes, 9 dislikes and 20 comments. The 3rd ranking comment referred to Jasmine Lee, the newly promoted assemblyman who is from the Philippines. It stated, “She as a foreigner dared to lie to the Korean citizens on television that she was a medical student when she actually dropped out of college as a biology major. That means she is only has a high school

diploma. There is no other reason for the large amount of crimes by foreigners in Korea. A foreigner who passed the screening process comes onto television and dares to lie, but still, this “pushover” country gives her a seat in the national assembly. This proves that Korea accepts all kinds of ex-convicts and drug dealers. Thus, smart and competent foreigners voluntarily do not come to this country. Also, why do they keep calling purchased marriages multiculturalism?” This comment received 206 likes, 3 dislikes, and 1 comment.

Case Study #4) “*The Suicide of the Vietnamese Mother was a Foreseeable Tragedy*”
(2012/11/24)⁴⁰

A 27-year-old Vietnamese wife jumped out of an apartment building, 18 stories high, with her 7-year old daughter and 3-year-old son. All three died on the spot. Her 47-year-old husband failed to stop her from jumping. She was in the middle of a divorce suit and she feared that she would lose custody over her two children so she made such an extreme decision. She left a letter saying that there is no point in living if she cannot live with her children and dying together is the only way that they will all be together forever.

This article received 1132 comments in total. The 1st ranking comment was “Purchasing marriage is bound for a disaster. Outlaw international purchasing marriage with women from poor, underdeveloped countries that were pursued for reproduction and satisfying desires. Why is prostitution illegal and purchasing marriage not a problem? This problem will be fixed if all the Korean Chinese who live with feudal mindsets die.” This comment received 1597 likes, 143

⁴⁰ “베트남 엄마의 자살은 예고된 참사였다,” Daum, November 24, 2012, <http://media.daum.net/society/newsview?newsid=20121124025649340>, accessed November 25, 2012.

dislikes, and 47 comments. The 2nd ranking comment was “*Damunhwa* that only superficially looks good, but has no protection nor solution. Her radical actions cannot be pardoned but she was placed on a cliff.” This comment received 1196 likes, 64 dislikes and 3 comments. The 3rd ranking comment was “Do the textbooks these days say a racially homogenous nation or do they teach about *damunhwa* in schools? I don’t know but I think that we must bring this issue up to the surface and change things from the education level.” This comment received 827 likes, 62 dislikes, and 22 comments.

Nate

Two case studies from Nate were selected and are presented below in the same manner as the previous section. The distinguishing trait of Nate.com is that all comments are posted with the real name of each user.

Case study #5) “*Plea for A Favorable Arrangement for a Multicultural Teenager who Committed Serial Arson*” (2012/06/26)⁴¹

Twenty-three Assemblymen from both the ruling party and the opposition party filed a petition to the Family Court. The organization that is helping this teenager Jung has attributed Jung’s arson to the “pureblood” culture of the Korean society. The Assemblymen agreed to the organization’s position that there is a need for policies that respect diversity to preclude other unfortunate incidents and for the improvement of a multicultural society. Jung was born between a Korean father and a Russian mother but as his mother left him when he was two-years-old, his

⁴¹ “"연쇄방화 다문화 청소년 선처" 호소,” Nate, June 26, 2012

<http://news.nate.com/view/20120626n16648>, accessed November 25, 2012.

grandparents raised him in Korea. He had difficulty assimilating into the Korean society and dropped out of school and eventually committed arson.

This article received 20 comments in total. The 1st ranking comment stated, “A crime is a crime... it can never be erased through a favorable ruling” and received 21 likes, 5 dislikes, and 0 comments. The 2nd ranking comment was “What crazy politicians! The most severe property damage is caused by fire. Theft preserves the property but fire demolishes it forever. From now on, arsonists must be sentenced with a life sentence or the death penalty if they have caused damage over a certain level. In today’s society, victims of arson are increasing by the minute. This itself is a problem but the lives that it can claim and the large-scale damages it can inflict have potential to become a serious crime.” This comment received 18 likes, 5 dislikes, and 0 comments. The 3rd ranking comment was “This is not even funny... They should process this case by the law. What favorable arrangements? A crime is a crime. Why pardon a *** (swear word) who couldn’t control his temper *** (swear word).” This comment received 20 likes, 7 dislikes, and 1 comment.

Case Study #6) “*Vietnamese woman in her 20s married in Korea, but her husband turns out to be ‘Oh my’*” (2012/06/24)⁴²

This article stated that migration through marriage to reach 0.44 million by 2030 in South Korea. It advised that Koreans must actively embrace multiculturalism to accelerate economic growth. To enhance national competitiveness, a proper amount of foreign labor is necessary.

⁴² “20대 베트남女, 한국서 결혼하자 남편이 ‘맙소사,’” Nate, June 24, 2012,

<http://news.nate.com/view/20120624n10590>, accessed November 25, 2012.

This article made a point saying that the situation has reached the point where people cannot speak of family in Korea without mentioning multiculturalism.

This article received 61 comments in total. The 1st ranking comment was “Think about trying to increase our country’s birthrate not promoting multiculturalism policies. As an example, it took more than 10 years for France to increase its birthrate, which was the lowest of all European countries, to more than 2 children per family. Birthrate policies do not work by just spending money.... a long-term management plan is crucial.... I don’t understand what the politicians are doing.” This comment received 111 likes, 9 dislikes, and 1 comment. The 2nd ranking comment was “They couldn’t care less about multicultural crimes.... so pathetic.” This comment received 109 likes, 10 dislikes, and 1 comment. The 3rd ranking comment stated, “Why don’t you just properly report on multicultural crime?” This comment received 100 likes, 10 dislikes, and 1 comment.

Case Study #7) Desperate *Damunhwa* Housewife, Bows Down on her Knees in front of the President 2012/04/27⁴³

At a government-sponsored workshop for monitoring government policies for housewives, a damunwha family housewife who originated from China ran out from the crowd and bowed down on her knees in front of President Lee Myung-bak. She pleaded for the equal treatment of Korean-Chinese and naturalized citizens who originated from Chinese without discrimination.

⁴³“절박한 다문화 주부의 대통령앞 '큰절',” Nate, April 27, 2012,

<http://news.nate.com/view/20120427n24943&mid=n0207&cid=309183>, accessed November 25, 2012.

This article received 457 comments in total. The 1st ranking comment was “Hey, don’t come to another country and try to change the culture. Go to your country and change your ethnicity. Personally, I have don’t have anything against *damunhwa* families. Why? Because I had family who were *damunhwa* too... however, when I saw you people and Lee Jasmine, everything was a mess. Why did you come to a country that did not do anything and try to change the culture? Regardless of the reason you came here, didn’t you come because you liked it here? Then shouldn’t you match the standards here? What our country people need to change is the perception of *damunhwa* families, not to change the culture as you say. That does not make any sense. If you want it that way, then change your original neighborhood to *damunhwa*~ Caucasians, Africans etc take care of all of them. Why come to this foreign land that is doing fine and try to change our culture? Why do you think there is the phrase, “when in Rome, do as the Romans do?” Why do we have to pay for your airfare with our precious tax money? Why do we need to give monthly payments to your family? I would rather like to give to our senior citizens or children breadwinners. If you changed your citizenship to Korean then it means that you like it here better than where you came from. Then follow our culture. Act straight to change the peoples’ perception and don’t say ridiculous things like you want to change our culture.” This comment received 1,457 likes, 137 dislikes, and 147 comments.

The 2nd ranking comment was “The top priority must be the safety of the citizens of Korea.” This comment received 1,181 likes, 42 dislikes, and 15 comments. The 3rd ranking comment was “There are nice and good Korean-Chinese but also ones that are evil. In current times, it is best for Korean-Chinese to just keep quiet. Just lay low and do not make a scene.” This comment received 1,027 likes, 77 dislikes and 36 comments.

Naver

Unlike Daum.net and Nate.com, Naver.com's main display is structured so that the main news section flashes the headlines of articles from various different news agencies. When you click on the article, it leads you directly to that news agency's webpage where the article was originally posted. Usually, these news agencies do have a comment section but the comment section is not as active as the ones on Daum or Nate, which take the same articles and restructure them so that all the articles have the same Daum or Nate layout and comment sections. The source of these articles is just labeled next to the title of the article. Thus, these two portals induce users to comment on a single place that has the effect of compounding the various responses in one location. Naver does provides such layout with a uniform comment system as well, but users have to click the separate "Naver News" tab and go to the main page of the News section hosted by Naver and click articles from there to see such uniformity.

Case Study #8) "*4 out of 10 children of Damunhwa families drop out of school*" (2012/08/15)⁴⁴
According to the Gyunggi Provincial assembly office of budget policy reports, 36% of elementary school, 51% of middle school, and 69% of high school students of *damunhwa* families drop out of school. The trend intensifies as the students proceed through the schooling system. The article highlights some factors that cause such large drop out rates as the lack of proficiency of the Korean language and lack of educational support. The article calls for the need for tailored support and the embracement of the local community.

⁴⁴“다문화가정 자녀 10명 중 4명은 학업 중도 포기,” Nate, August 15, 2012,

<http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=102&oid=028&aid=0002153631>, accessed November 27, 2012.

This article received 24 comments in total. The 1st ranking comment was “Ten years from now, these children will become the mafia of Korea and create a center for drug trafficking, murder by contract, and prostitution.” This comment had 19 likes and 3 dislikes and 2 comments. The 2nd ranking comment was “I knew this would happen. Gradually, the evils of *damunhwa* are revealing themselves. I am really frustrated. However, what fault do these children have? At least we should provide them with a high school diploma. These children will have to face discrimination because of the fact that they are half South East Asian and with barely a middle school or high school education, what kind of jobs can they find? They will have to work in 3D (Dangerous, Dirty, Difficult) labor positions, but they would have probably lived in Korea for over 20 years by then and would fellow Korean children want to work in those jobs? Also, the extreme possibility of high crime rates fuel by the anger against Korea...just the thought of it makes me shudder. For your information, I am an anti-multiculturalist, especially adamantly against Muslim foreign laborers.” This comment received 16 likes, 1 dislike and 0 comments. The 3rd ranking comment was “Is this a new scheme to make a new lower class...please do not marry like that. It only increases social problems.” This comment received 19 likes, 4 dislikes and 0 comments.

Case Study #9) “*Era of Damunhwa troops/soldiers...12000 in 2028*” (2012/06/12)⁴⁵

A noncommissioned officer of a *damunhwa* family is the first to be commissioned since the military was established. Currently, 179 in the Army, 9 in the Air Force, 5 in the Navy are

⁴⁵“다문화 國軍 시대... 2028년엔 1만2000명,” Naver, June 12, 2012,

<http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=100&oid=023&aid=0002403>

[004](#), accessed November 27, 2012.

serving in their military duty as those from *damunhwa* families. This year, 1165 *damunhwa* men were drafted. In the current era of low fertility rates, *damunhwa* families are providing to be important sources of the military. Starting from last year, all regardless of skin color were drafted and admitted into the military.

This article received 77 comments in total. The 1st ranking comment was “I know for sure that if they keep relentlessly accepting *damunhwa* people into the military, then those foreigners will start shooting sprees.” This comment received 12 likes, 2 dislikes and 3 comments. The 2nd ranking comment was “He is only 18 and already waiting to be commissioned? Oh, you can become an uncommissioned officer without even graduating from high school. They are giving preferential treatment to those *damunhwa* people. They probably did not even take the test and still got in. Wow look at how this country is run.” This comment received 10 likes, 1 dislike and 2 comments. The 3rd ranking comment was “Nowadays, being a *damunhwa* family is such a privilege and you get special treatment. You earn ten million won and still receive full support for childcare fees. Also, why are there so many of those *damunhwa* centers? Children of *damunhwa* families are not even drafted to the military. The law is so weird.” This comment received 9 likes, 0 dislikes, and 1 comment.

Case Study #10) “‘*Old Bachelor of the Countryside + Young South East Asian Bride*’ is now *Outdated, Change in International Marriages*” (2012/11/21)⁴⁶

⁴⁶ “‘시골 노총각+ 동남아 어린신부’는 옛말..국제결혼 변화,” Naver, November 21, 2012, <http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=102&oid=008&aid=0002951456>, accessed November 27, 2012.

Overall, international marriages are declining in South Korea. In more detail, the international marriages of men aged 45 and over are decreasing while they are increasing for those in the “ripe for marriage” cohorts. This trend may be explained by the government’s effort to regulate unhealthy marriage broking practices, and discourage divorces.

This article received 773 comments in total. The 1st ranking comment was “I’ve seen a rich guy in his 50s marrying international to make a sex slave!! The government should strictly regulate such international marriages with young South East Asian women that resemble human trafficking.” This comment received 212 likes, 19 dislikes, and 4 comments. The 2nd ranking comment was “Also, in South East Asia, anti-Korean sentiment is at a dangerous level. Liking the Korean Wave is a separate issue. They despise Korea for taking all their eligible women, leaving the men without women to marry, and for all the horrid stories of domestic violence and financial hardships that those women suffer after they come to Korea.” This comment received 165 likes, 20 dislikes, and 6 comments. The 3rd ranking comment was “We are buying so many women from South East Asia. At this rate, in twenty or thirty years, the countryside will become little South East Asia.” This comment received 156 likes, 13 dislikes, and 1 comment.

Discussion

Public opinion on *damunhwa* reflects the primarily inflammatory and very negative opinions that circulate on the Internet. Possibly as a reaction to the lack of a centralized and focused source of public opinion, several anti-*damunhwa* cafés have emerged in the cyber scene. A café is an Internet website that usually has a theme that attracts Internet users to register as members and share information through its discussion boards. Although the particular anti-*damunhwa* café that we examined for this paper is hosted in Daum, other portals such as Naver

also provide the option for people to make or join cafés. This anti-*damunhwa* café is called the “*Damunhwa* Policy Opposition(다문화정책반대)” and has 10,562 members to date(2012/12/1).⁴⁷ The notable aspect about this café is that it is an attempt to centralize and mobilize netizens against *damunhwa* both on- and offline. There are many anti-*damunhwa* blogs, postings, and comments scattered all around the vast space of the Internet. These individual and unorganized attempts to vocalize opposition to *damunhwa* and the government’s *damunhwa* policies are at most individuals expressing personal opinions. However, when a café such as the “*Damunhwa* Policy Opposition” establishes a sizable member base and organizes its content to systematically categorize all the information and opinions in one location, it effectively starts attracting netizens. Once the café establishes reputation and presence in the Internet scene, more users flock to this café, bringing more information and contact to add to their already rapidly growing database. This allows the individuals who oppose *damunhwa* to congregate and wield collective power in public opinion, and more importantly, in offline political activities.

This café is clearly aiming to create an offline group to lobby politicians and directly affect *damunhwa* policies. The initial survey that is required of all who wish to be official members asks the new member’s age, region of residence, and views on *damunhwa*. All of this information is used later to mobilize members to pressure their local representatives in the National Assembly and participate in demonstrations. Not only does the café encourage members to participate in opposing *damunhwa* on all levels of society, this café explicitly organizes its content in a very negative light. For instance, some of the discussion boards are labeled, “organizations and individuals that support *damunhwa*,” “the dirty demagoguery of the media,” “government policies that support *damunhwa*,” “cases of crimes committed by

⁴⁷ “다문화정책 반대” <http://cafe.daum.net/dacultureNO>, accessed November 29, 2012.

foreigners” and so on.⁴⁸ They even have a separate discussion board that is labeled “Promoting Anti-*damunhwa* to non-members,” which is filled with articles and information that are heavily biased against *damunhwa*. All of the content on this café is aggressively against all kinds of *damunhwa*-related policies and issues. The content posted by its members seems to reflect genuine disgust and concern for the negative affects of an increased presence of “foreigners” in Korea.

Are the members of this café really just a group of radicals or do they vocalize the uneasiness of the majority of Koreans? Although many onlookers would simply criticize this café as a typical form of xenophobia stemming from the fear of losing jobs to foreign competition, we look at this café as a social symptom of a lack of apt communication between the citizens and the Korean government. The government may have decided to pursue such policies in favor of *damunhwa* based on a thorough understanding of both the issue at stake and the necessity of implementing such policies. However, for the average Korean citizens, it may be difficult to understand why the Korean government, which is supposedly working in the Korean citizens’ interest, is making such active attempts to integrate those who seem to be “foreigners” into the Korean society. It is this lack of understanding on many levels that fuels such hatred expressed in the inflammatory comments and the anti-*damunhwa* café. First, there is a lack of a clear consensus on what constitutes a “Korean” among the members of the Korean society; this creates different and even false notions of “us” and “them” that exacerbates the animosity brewing on the Internet and in real life. Second, the false perception of reality that the Korean society has about its social composition is problematic in dealing with *damunhwa* issues in an effective way. The government must clarify the demographic reality to its citizens. South Korea

⁴⁸ “다문화정책반대” <http://cafe.daum.net/dacultureNO>, accessed November 29, 2012.

is no longer a “homogenous country” as the citizens still believe to be and quite frankly, take pride for. Lastly, a lack of official channels for discourse on *damunhwa* issues between the government and the citizens and among the citizens also drives unhappy citizens to angrily comment on the Internet. The government must extend its resources and services to educate and promote the need for *damunhwa* policies for its citizens. Keeping an official channel for constant feedback from the public is crucial to gain trust from the public.

Conclusion

Through the examination of a selection of articles on multiculturalism *damunhwa* on the three web portals--Daum.net, Nate.com, and Naver.com--it was clear that many Koreans were upset about the government policies and the current reality of multiculturalism in Korea. There were usually two kinds of news articles on these portals. The first were articles that provided information about events and news related to multiculturalism while the second were specifically geared toward highlighting the problems and struggles that the multicultural families have in Korea. In general, the former did not receive much attention while the latter were responded to by fierce comments as displayed in this report. This may be due to the fact that the web portals, which live off of the number of users and clicks they receive for their content, intentionally cast provocative headlines so that many users will click on them and comment. Also, most of the articles reporting on multiculturalism position the foreigners and immigrants as the victim, which impacts the tone of the article itself.

What is certain is that the Korean society is aware of multiculturalism and is interested, but does not have an effective solution to soothe the social turbulence that the discourse on multiculturalism is creating. Much of the angst penetrating through the Internet in forms of

inflammatory comments and radical cyber congregations is created by an multifaceted misunderstanding and swelling fears on part of the “original” Koreans. Without an effort to address such grievances, *damunhwa* issues may expand into a complicated form of ethnic conflict that may pose great challenges unprecedented in this “homogenous” country.

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Table 1. Number of Immigrants to South Korea in the Residence and Marriage Visa Categories for the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, by sex: 2011

Type of Visa/Group	TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES
RESIDENCE			
Total to South Korea	20,333	2,364	17,969
Philippines	1631	31	1600
Thailand	174	5	169
Vietnam	6989	36	6953
MARRIAGE IMMIGRATION			
Total to South Korea	783	58	725
Philippines	96	1	95
Thailand	8	0	8
Vietnam	351	0	351

SOURCE: KOSIS, “Number of Incoming Foreigners by type of visa and citizenship,”

[DT_1B28023]

<http://kosis.kr/nsieng/view/stat10.do>

Table 2. Frequency of the Keywords *Damunhwa* and Migrant Women in Articles Available Through Daum, Naver, and Nate: 2008-2012

	<i>Damunhwa</i>			Migrant Women		
	Daum	Naver	Nate	Daum	Naver	Nate
2008	7,135	9828	12983	3106	3041	5504
2009	29,267	22,741	26,862	6810	4539	6362
2010	43,127	34,651	41,207	8211	5782	8007
2011	67,297	41,113	47,071	12748	6594	9353
2012*	71,887	46,708	46,300	12065	6920	8331

*Through October.